

A photograph of a white Gothic Revival church. The church features a tall, multi-tiered steeple with a brown roof and a large, dark cross mounted on the facade above the entrance. The architecture includes pointed Gothic arches for windows and doorways, and decorative moldings. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

# *Faith Conquers Grief*

A congregation and community forgives, heals,  
and creates a lasting legacy

**By Perdita B. Spriggs**

South Carolina and the nation will forever mourn the June 17 night when one of the state's own would mercilessly massacre nine African-American Emanuel AME parishioners. They opened their doors, and hearts, to Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old white man, who sat with their bible study group for almost an hour before gunning down three men and six women. He would later be arrested and charged with a hate crime. Those spared, and the victims' families, astonishingly, forgave him in court.

But how does a church heal and recover from such a brutal and seemingly senseless racially charged attack that shakes its very core?

"The congregation is reeling and just trying to move forward," says Charleston native Germone Gadsden whose 9-year-old daughter and slain Pastor Clementa Pinckney's daughters were playmates. "They've been very strong and focused on forgiveness." Gadsden, who regularly visits Emanuel, understands why "the world was surprised and couldn't understand how the angered and frustrated families could forgive just days after the shootings," he says, but Mother Emanuel teaches forgiveness and love. Collectively, the nation ached for people who had so much taken from them and can still forgive."

Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church stands reverently in the heart of downtown Charleston, SC, respected as an unshakeable force among the city's African-American community. Emanuel is the mother of AME churches in the South, well-known for her diverse socio-economic congregation. According to the church's history, Mother Emanuel "was borne of discrimination, burned to the ground in hate, and rose again" and has persevered time and again in the face of racial hostility. The congregation must now rebound and emotionally rebuild after racial hate entered its sanctuary.

**It Will Take Time**

Church member Kathleen Snype returned to Emanuel the Sunday after the horrific shootings, attending the wakes and funerals of her friends. "Faith and belief in God is the key to our healing," she says.

Snype fondly remembers each of the victims as "rocks"

**"The whole Emanuel church is a big family, and getting over this is hard."  
—Kathleen Snype**



**Clementa Pinckney**



**Depayne Doctor**



**Cynthia Hurd**



**Susie Jackson**



**Ethel Lance**



**Tywanza Sanders**



**Daniel Simmons**



**Sharonda Coleman-Singleton**



**Myra Thompson**

in the church. "The whole Emanuel church is a big family," she says, "and getting over the tragedy will take time. Some members have worked tirelessly since June 17 and continue to do so. A lot of the members have returned, others are returning when they feel confident, and still others may never return."

Twenty-four hour media attention streamed the tragedy into homes across the nation and spurred heartfelt compassion for the Charleston congregation. Several million dollars, raised through fundraising initiatives and generous donations from well-meaning individuals and businesses, will ensure Emanuel 9 families, and the church, are solidly prepared to move forward.

Gadsden, a Charleston-based wealth manager and Citadel grad, is helping lead an alumni group in the initial stages of funding church scholarships that assist church members attend his alma mater. He is grateful the community is supporting Emanuel with open arms.



“Watching people come together...I’m very proud of what they’ve been able to do. This level of dignity, grace, and compassion is rarely found, and that’s the reason the church will rebound, have hurdles, but be just fine.”

### Turning Conversations to Action

State Senator Marlon Kimpson (D-Charleston) emotionally recounts his friendship with Reverend Pinckney, his fellow Charleston senator. “We were together in Columbia earlier that day. He left our session to return for the church meeting and bible study that evening,” he remembers. “The church is feeling a lot of pain, and people are still healing.” He adds, “I can’t even describe how courageous the families are to forgive.”

Senator Kimpson notes Mother Emanuel’s role as a meeting place for organizers to discuss social and civil rights issues. He believes the congregation and community will rebound, constructively using the incident as an opportunity to engage in race relation conversations and

other important issues.

“I hope we can turn the conversations that have occurred in the aftermath of this horrific event into action and opportunities that will enable our children to have a better future,” he emphasizes. “We’ve removed the [Confederate] flag from the State House, and now is the time to roll-up our sleeves and focus on substance.”

The tragedy has also led to blurred racial lines in the Charleston church community. Snype remembers, “White congregations willingly provided us food and water in the days following the shooting. They also provided use of their sanctuary

during funeral services and special prayer services for our children on Thursday evenings.” A mixed congregation now shares pews on Sunday mornings, listening for spiritual guidance and praying for heavenly strength.

Senator Kimpson feels Mother Emanuel’s members have, “grown stronger together. They are carrying on the legacy for those who died, and with grace and courage are a

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## Emanuel 9 Victims

All were leaders and well respected in their community. Their loss will be felt forever.

Reverend Clementa Pinckney, 41

Susie Jackson, 87

Reverend Daniel Simmons, 74

Ethel Lance, 70

Myra Thompson, 69

Cynthia Hurd, 54

Depayne Middleton Doctor, 49

Reverend Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, 45

Tywanza Sanders, 26

## Fundraising Initiatives

Several opportunities are available to support the Emanuel 9 victims’ families and the church, including:

The Mother Emanuel Hope Fund

Moving Forward Campaign

The Mother Emanuel-Rev. Clementa

Pinckney Endowment Fund

The Matching Fund

To support Emanuel

AME’s Nobel Peace Prize

nomination, please visit: [www.nobelpeaceprizeforcharleston.com](http://www.nobelpeaceprizeforcharleston.com)

voice for their perished church members.” He commends the efforts of South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley, Charleston Mayor Joe Riley, law enforcement, church leadership, and everyone who has offered the families support.

Gadsden notes that throughout history, most civil rights milestones were precipitated by a single defining moment.



“You want to take opportunity to move the [racial] agenda forward because people’s hearts and minds are open,” he points out. “That’s when change occurs, during an undeniable tragic event. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, ‘Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.’ Mother Emanuel is a living, inspiring example of its teachings.”

Recovering after such a terrible tragedy takes time, and returning to a new normal will be difficult. In the meantime, Snypes holds steadfastly to the belief, “We are going to survive.”

Support continues to pour in as the congregation copes, recovers, and creates a legacy for its fallen family. Plans are being discussed to erect a permanent Emanuel 9 memorial to honor the victims’ lives. Momentum is also growing for Emanuel AME Church’s Nobel Peace Prize nomination, led by a 15-member Illinois delegation.

In a press release statement accepting the delegation’s nomination, Reverend Dr. Norvel Goff, interim pastor, said, ‘This is a journey of healing. We’ve never been here before but God knows all about it. In faith, not in fear, in love, not in hate.’ ■

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